

ES&H UPDATE

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False Fire Alarms

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During 2003 the Fermi Fire Department was dispatched 343 times for emergencies. Of these, 60 runs were attributed to false alarms.



A false alarm is any alarm caused by human error or equipment problems, when there is no evidence of an actual fire.

Fire alarm systems provide an early warning to protect lives and property. When properly installed, used, and maintained, they can be invaluable. However, it is a fairly easy matter to trip a fire/smoke detector through carelessness. When misused, they become a liability. False alarms cost the Laboratory money, as well as diverting fire department resources away from potential emergencies such as actual fires, accidents, elevator releases/rescues, hazardous material spills and medical responses

What is a False Fire Alarm?

Cost of a False Fire Alarm at Fermilab:

	Action	Average # of people involved / event	Response time/event	Total time for 60 False Alarms	Average Employee Cost/hour	Total cost for 60 False alarms
FFD	Respond to alarm	5	30 minutes	150 hours	\$50/hour	\$7500
Fire Techs Employees	Reset alarm	1	15 minutes	15 hours	\$50/hour	\$750
	Evacuate and await FD arrival	15	30 minutes	450 hours	\$50/hour	\$22,500
Total		21		615 hours		\$30, 750

Hidden Costs

In addition to the hard dollar cost, there is the hidden cost in the decreased confidence in alarm signals/systems by the facility tenants. If there are continual false alarms in a building, the occupants will become complacent and perhaps stop responding to the alarm. If there happens to be an actual alarm, the results could be disastrous.

How can you avoid setting off a false fire alarm?

- If you're working** Plan your work!
Secure the proper permits for welding and brazing.
Determine if the work you are about to do will impact the detectors in the area. Will this work generate smoke, dust, and/or odors?
Follow procedures for system disablements by contacting your task manager, SSO, or Fire Department.
- If you're cooking** Whenever cooking-**NEVER** leave it unattended, whether using an oven, stove or microwave.
Use the range hood or open windows and doors to dispel steam and heat. Follow the manufacturer's guide as to temperature settings and duration of cooking.
Roll up your sleeves and avoid wearing loose clothing.
Keep children and pets from a three-foot "safe zone" around your stove.
Keep pot handles turned in to avoid spills.
Keep potholders, dishtowels, food packaging and other clutter off the stovetop.
Clean your cooking equipment; built-up grease can catch fire.
- If an alarm sounds** Respond to the alarm – evacuate the building immediately.
Call 3131 from a safe location.
Remain at the designated assembly point until the Fire Department returns the scene back over to the Div/Sec management.

*This message should be distributed to all employees via delivery of un-addressed copies to Fermilab mail stations.
Suggestions for ES&H message topics should be directed to Mary Logue at grace@fnal.gov or X6329.*